Note of Governors’ Monitoring Visit 7th December 2017

Governors attending:

Graham Herniman

Leanne Hedden

1. The Schedule for the Visit is attached.
2. Our first session was with Jane Martin, who took us through work that had been done during the term and specifically in response to the public exam results in the summer. Attached is a summary of the various interventions that have been put in place. Our discussion focused on these inputs, the first outcomes from which should be seen early in the new term in the mock results, to be reviewed by S and P Committee on 23rd January. We talked at length about the number of Ds achieved by last year’s Yr12 and the relevance of ASs in the new regime. An emerging school of thought is that, in common with many schools, we stop offering ASs, as evidence is suggesting they divert attention away from the focus on the full A level. While a number of team leaders originally thought they were co-teachable, the results suggest this may not be as true as expected. Discussions with team leaders would begin next term.
3. The second bullet point on the attached list is designed to address the suspicion that because students only needed a D in their exams at the end of Yr12 and because those results did not count towards their A level grade, they simply aimed for a D. This year, they will receive their mock results in a more formal way, akin to the summer results day, with a formal letter and the inclusion of UCAS points, to enable them to see how close or otherwise they are to their university offers, for example, with the aim of motivating them to step up their pace and take advantage of support on offer.
4. There are 15 students receiving pupil premium mentoring.
5. The Yr 11 conference takes place in January, after the mocks. Students are divided into groups according to their results, so they can be counselled on their options for September. This enables staff to manage students’ expectations: for our high fliers, it is a chance to encourage them to see SHS as the ideal 6th form for them; it enables those who are thinking of doing subjects they are currently unlikely to meet the entry requirements for to make informed choices; and it helps those who are unlikely to secure enough points to stay on at all to be thinking about their options. We did point out the risk that this approach at the lower attainment end might demotivate students but had to recognise the School was legally required to ensure that students were not NEET (not in education, employment and training) at the end of Yr 13, so other destinations needed to be considered.
6. We also discussed the difference between higher and foundation maths. This presents the School with a challenge. Ideally more students should sit the higher paper as they only need to score 25% to get a 4; the requirement for a 4 in the foundation paper is much higher so harder to get. However, students are reluctant to take the higher paper as they find it daunting.
7. It is clear the School have put in place a wide range of interventions to address the findings from the summer. The impact should be seen after Christmas.
8. We met members of the Student Leadership team, who were a mixture of those who had been in the School since Yr 7 and those, including the Head Girl, who had come to SHS in Yr. 12. They were a positive, articulate and confident group of people, telling us how they were using their role, about their Shenfield “journey” and about what we could do even better. All those who had been in the School since Yr 7 cited improved discipline and behaviour as key during their time (“when I joined, a Yr 11 would push a Yr 7 around. That wouldn’t happen now”). They welcomed the additional study space but regretted that some were using it as additional social space, the growing 6th form making the official social spaces overcrowded. They acknowledged the resource issue here and said that Mr. Cooke’s interventions (such as removing privileges) was helping. Teaching standards have improved and the majority said they were pushed. Teachers were always supportive with an open door policy and they had had masses of help with their university applications.
9. We discussed the 6th form’s whole school contribution. They did not feel there was as much use of the 6th form as mentors this year as previously (we followed this up and were told it is because fewer Yr 7s need mentors this year). They are focusing on charity work, citing this term’s efforts. They also saw integration of Yrs 12 and 13 as a challenge (a similar theme to last year’s team) but were tackling this with such things as a welcome breakfast.
10. We then saw members of the School Council, accompanied by Andy Cooke who supports the Council, one each from Yrs 8 and 9 and two from Yr10. These were another group of confident, articulate young people, who had volunteered for the Council to “give something back” and because they knew it would be a plus on their CV. One student cited it as good experience should he choose to go into politics. Their focus was on charity work, and they were meeting the following week to develop some ideas. Some had previous experience of serving on the Council and said that it had a positive effect because issues raised were dealt with and things changed as a result, although they recognised that sometimes what they wanted was unrealistic.
11. We then saw Andy on his own to talk through his and James MacDonald’s work to market the 6th form, particularly for next September when the pressure is on to recruit an even higher proportion of externals because of the small size of Yr 11. Andy is very clear that lowering standards to hit our numbers to the extent that we set students up to fail is not an option for him, although he realises the financial reality of our position. He is optimistic that the marketing efforts will produce the result we need. He cited the massive turnout for the open evening which far exceeded the numbers we have previously seen. He had been surprised by the numbers attending from other local schools who were clearly looking for real alternatives, although he stressed that he knows students will hold more than one option. He said that the School’s approach to 6th form recruitment, with the Head leading the open evening, with a proper application process followed by interviews and offers and an opportunity to look at changing choices was seen to be a superior process to those of other schools. The pastoral support is well known and many potential students cited it as one of the things attracting them to Shenfield. Andy gave us a list of the schools he and James have visited to promote Shenfield, and they also attended the Havering 6th form event, where schools and colleges had stalls akin to a recruitment fair. He said he had learnt lessons from that, and that, next year, with minimal investment, he would be able to present the School in an even more professional manner. Attached is the handout Andy had prepared, which provides more detail.
12. Jonathan Sands joined us to talk us through the various initiatives he has been working on since taking up his Assistant Head post. Firstly, he talked us through a new approach to performance management which focuses on teachers’ contribution to their team’s improvement plan, which is, in turn linked to whole school priorities, and links CPD to gaps in teachers’ ability to support delivery of those outcomes - identified by line managers - as well as career development. There has also been a focus on continual development of classroom practice, rather than focusing on showcase lessons. He cited John Ninian, a very experienced and highly esteemed colleague, who has focused his performance management on developing his practice with students with a very low level of literacy and developing an innovative scheme of work based on Dungeons and Dragons to help to engage students while developing their literacy.
13. CPD has been restructured so that all teachers have two general sessions, this year relating to preparing for middle, senior or pastoral leadership, and teaching and learning. Then they have 2 sessions a year which relate to their personal development needs. These include behaviour management, differentiation, assessment and a teacher toolkit.
14. This is all planned with colleagues, with middle leaders working with team leaders, and appropriate but not burdensome recording, to support performance assessment.
15. He then spoke to us about plans to replace homework with “prep” – see attached paper, which provides full detail. Governors know that homework is a perennial issue with parents, some of whom believe that their child is not being pushed hard enough if they are not given regular and challenging homework. The reality, as the School is now seeing it, is that because of the need to make homework accessible to all students, it is not adding value to either progress or attainment and is creating a workload for staff whose time could be spent more productively. The Head has long said that a brave school would do away with homework all together, but this approach retains it in the form of preparation and/or consolidating learning done during the day. It is thought that this will also improve students’ independent learning capabilities. Teachers will know whether students are doing their prep from the results they deliver in class, and feedback will be given where it is clear that students aren’t preparing sufficiently. Banks of subject information needed to be prepared and we expressed some concern that there was insufficient time to make that material available to implement this system in January, which is the plan. It would also need careful and repeated articulation of the change to parents, and some revision of the School’s homework policy. It was noted, however, that the approach has already been introduced into a number of departments.
16. Jono concluded by taking us through #MoveYourDeckchair, which is an approach encouraging teachers to look at individual students from a different perspective. This is designed to target a range of students with different needs. It is being trialled with Yr 11 and a PP/SEN student, a G & T student, a student with 6th form ambitions but one who is not on course to achieve the points, and the invisible student who quietly gets on but attracts no attention. Again, a note is attached (from which I have excluded the names, for data protection reasons) which explains the approach in more detail. This is in its first wave but he expects to be able to cover the whole year group before the exams take place. This is an interesting initiative which has the potential to make a step change on improving standards across the School.
17. Finally, we saw Ben Clifford who reported to us on his and Richard Drew’s work to support Yr 7s who arrive in School having not met the expected standard of the 100 scaled score in their SATs at primary, for whom we receive extra funding. A written report with details of impact and the interventions is attached.
18. Feeding back to the Head, we told her that we had had another very positive experience and that the students in particular had given us evidence of the impact the School was having. There was little we could offer by way of challenge, but it was clear that the burgeoning 6th form was feeling the squeeze, literally, in terms of physical capacity. This is perhaps something that governors can discuss at their January strategy meeting as to do anything substantive in this area would require a strategic response. We also repeated our concerns about the swift move to prep from homework, in so much as it needed very clear communication to parents before it started, and continuous repeating of the message over coming months. Success in this area is dependent on a parental culture change and the School must lead it. Finally, we noted that the literacy and numeracy catch up premium report did not contain an intervention by intervention costing, in the way that the full pupil premium report did. We were reassured that the School is not required to do that.

Leanne Hedden

13th December 2017